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DDI- 00697/85

DDI Chrono

11 FEB 1985

Central Intelligence Agency
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

11 FEB 1985

NOTE TO: The Honorable Fred C. Ikle
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
The Pentagon

Attached is the Executive Summary of an Intelligence Assessment that details Soviet and East German infringements of Allied rights during the last few years and presents our view of the motivations behind them. It also discusses prospects for restoring an air regime compatible with Allied safety requirements, as well as the possible merits and risks of stronger Allied responses -- including demonstration flights through disputed airspace.

The full text of the assessment is in the final stage of the publication process. It will be available later this week, and we will send copies to your staff. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Robert M. Gates
Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attachment:
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NOTE TO: The Honorable Michael M. Armacost
Under Secretary for Political Affairs
Department of State

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NOTE TO: VADM John M. Poindexter
Deputy Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House

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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

5 February 1985

MEMORANDUM

Challenges to the Western Position In and Around Berlin

Executive Summary

During 1984, the Soviets and East Germans took a series of actions in and around Berlin that further eroded Western rights based on four power agreements and/or longstanding practice. As a result, the Western position in and around Berlin is not as good as it was a year ago.

Recent Soviet actions primarily reflect Moscow's long-term goal to change the status quo to its advantage whenever opportunities arise to do so without provoking a crisis. The Soviets apparently view an incremental approach to change in quadripartite arrangements as the best means of gaining Western acquiescence in their interpretation of the rules governing access to Berlin. Similarly, they remain motivated by a desire to enhance the sovereignty and legitimacy of the East German regime, especially when they estimate the risks of Allied counterreaction are small. And the Soviets and East Germans are always watchful to stymie any perceived West German efforts to strengthen political ties between the Federal Republic and West Berlin. But the Allies, not the West Germans, appear to have been the primary target of Soviet actions in 1984.

The Soviets took steps in early December apparently designed to defuse Western protests over its actions last year and to avoid the appearance of an East-West confrontation over Berlin. This seeming flexibility may have been timed to influence Allied discussions of Berlin issues at the December NATO ministerial meeting. It also may have reflected increasing Soviet interest in smoothing over secondary disputes with the United States in anticipation of the meeting between Secretary Shultz and Foreign Minister Gromyko in early January.

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Soviet and East German Actions in 1984

The adverse actions taken during 1984 involved technical matters and have antecedents in earlier disputes. In addition to pursuing the Soviets' long-term quest for advantage, the steps could also be interpreted as an effort to remind the West of its vulnerability in Berlin at a time of heightened East-West tension:

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-- On 15 November, the East Germans closed the Glienicker Bridge, the military liaison missions' primary transit point between West Berlin and their headquarters in Potsdam. Although reopened on the same day, the East Germans indicated that the bridge would be closed again if the West Berlin Senat (government) did not agree to its terms for financing repairs to and maintenance of the bridge.

As a result of seeming new Soviet and East German flexibility in December, some progress toward ameliorating differences has been made on two of these issues. Soviet officials in West Berlin "notified" several reservations for less than the full length of the corridors and indicated that most future reservations will include similar geographic limits. In addition, the East Germans and the Senat reached an agreement on the Glienicker Bridge in which the East Germans backed away from their insistence that West Berlin pay for maintenance of the bridge. Because the East Germans had no apparent direct interest in coming to a quick agreement to keep the bridge open, we believe their retreat probably was at the behest of the Soviets. But despite their recent readiness to seek compromises, the Soviets still are asserting the right to make unilateral adjustments in the air corridor regime, contrary to the Allied position that the corridors remain a four-power responsibility.

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We believe that Soviet frustration over failing to block INF deployments contributed to last year's troubling actions on Berlin issues. Soviet restrictions on the air corridors and military liaison mission travel have an inherent military rationale suggesting that recommendations by Soviet military commanders in East Germany -- whose military requirements now differ considerably from those that existed when the access understandings were established -- may have weighed heavily in Kremlin deliberations. Soviet political authorities may have approved such recommendations as a convenient way to signal to the West the costs of increased East-West tensions. Soviet decisionmaking regarding Berlin may also have been affected by leadership changes in Moscow. The air corridor and military liaison mission travel decisions were implemented at a time when the top level leadership picture was in considerable flux after the accession to power of General Secretary Chernenko and may reflect increased influence on the part of Gromyko.

The degree of Soviet and East German harassment to date almost certainly does not itself endanger the Western presence in Berlin; Western access has been inconvenienced but not reduced or explicitly threatened. Indeed, a consensus appears to exist among US experts on Berlin that the West does not face an imminent crisis in Berlin and that the situation remains relatively calm, especially when compared to periods in the past and to the high level of East-West tension in recent years.

Options for Responding to Eastern Encroachments

The West nonetheless faces a difficult task in responding to Soviet and East German encroachments. The three Western powers sometimes are not in agreement on how to respond. Moreover, there would be little public sympathy in Western Europe for any Allied effort to escalate issues that almost certainly would be perceived as minor -- such as the extent of corridor reservations -- into a major East-West confrontation.

The prospects for a settlement that restores a greater measure of quadripartite management of the air corridors or leads to geographic limits on reservations more acceptable to the Allies probably would increase if an East-West thaw leads Soviet authorities to decide that Berlin issues are not worth the potential damage to improved relations. A more cooperative Soviet attitude also may come about if President Reagan decides to visit West Berlin in May: The Soviets, anxious to maintain the perception that they were not doing anything to disrupt the calm in Berlin, became unusually cooperative on several issues before the President's last visit in 1982.

Stronger Actions. The Soviets might also move to satisfy Allied demands if the West, despite possible problems with Western public opinion, escalates its response to unilateral actions beyond verbal protests. This would appreciably boost the potential costs to Moscow of its piecemeal efforts to erode Allied access. But such Allied reactions are risky since we cannot be certain how the Soviets will respond. The Soviet response to a specific Allied action would depend on the nature and timing of the action, the local circumstances leading up to it, the state of East-West relations at the time, and other factors such as leadership politics in Moscow.

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Given the West's vulnerability in Berlin, the Allies have few options in responding to Soviet behavior, while Moscow has many options for counterreactions. The Allies could take actions against Soviet interests in and around Berlin, but these would be largely limited to harassment of Soviet personnel. Another option would be to take action on a non-Berlin issue of importance to Moscow, clearly linking such a move to the Soviet position on Allied rights in Berlin. For example, the United States could tie continued refusal to reinstate US landing rights for Aeroflot to the air corridor issue. The Allies could also make further high-level demarches, perhaps accompanied by a stated readiness to send demonstration flights through disputed airspace at the eastern ends of the corridors. These options would not carry the risk of a military incident in Berlin, but could nevertheless provoke Soviet counterreactions, including increased harassment of Allied personnel in and around Berlin.

Demonstration Flights. Actual demonstration flights through disputed airspace would be the riskiest option since they could result in the shooting down of an Allied aircraft. Even if the Allies were to limit their penetration of reserved airspace to the disputed miles at the ends of the corridors, the Soviets could increase military air activity in the area to enhance the risk for the Allies of mid-air collisions.

Although risks always will exist, we believe there are conditions and times when strong Allied responses -- including demonstration flights -- have a greater likelihood of successfully deterring the Soviets from abridging Allied rights, or of forcing the Soviets to acknowledge Western positions. Ironically, we believe a strong response is more likely to achieve Western objectives when Moscow has a solidly perceived interest in improved relations with the West. In such an environment, Soviet leaders probably would be more reluctant than they are now to permit Berlin issues to pose an unnecessary burden on overall East-West relations. We also believe the effectiveness of stronger Allied actions would be greater -- and the risks probably less -- if they were taken in the early stages of a dispute.

In the case of the air corridors, a strong response shortly after 20 February 1984 would have demonstrated to the Soviets how seriously the Allies viewed the situation. Indeed, available evidence shows that the Soviets did not initially use the disputed airspace, suggesting they probably were waiting to see how the Allies would respond. We believe that now, however, the risks are fairly high that stronger actions would undercut -- rather than reenforce -- the apparent recent Soviet willingness to compromise on Berlin issues. The leadership situation in Moscow and the course of East-West relations remain uncertain, and statements by Soviet officials in Berlin indicate they believe they already are taking steps to assuage Allied concerns on Berlin issues. At some point in the future, especially if US-Soviet relations improve and the Soviets continue to impinge on Allied rights, stronger actions may stand a greater chance of success at lower risk.

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More Serious Challenges Possible

More serious Soviet challenges to the West in and around Berlin cannot be ruled out. On the one hand, West German efforts to increase the Federal Republic's ties to West Berlin could provoke Soviet retaliation. At the moment, West Germany is a special target for Soviet hostility, albeit for its alleged drift toward "revanchism" and not specifically for any activities it is undertaking in Berlin. A perceived Allied failure in the future to contain assertive West German behavior in Berlin, therefore, could provide Moscow the pretext for seeking further changes in the status quo in Berlin. And West German actions aside, Berlin will remain an arena in which Moscow can bring pressure to bear on the Western Allies, specifically the United States. In the event that East-West relations do not develop favorably from Moscow's point of view or that US actions are perceived as dangerous to important Soviet interests in regions less accessible to Soviet military power, Moscow might be tempted to exploit its inherent leverage over Western access to Berlin in more direct and threatening ways.

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